

**REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 22, 2011**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on Tuesday, February 22, 2011 at 7:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers, 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield.

Present: Councilors Drake, Hurley, Kotkin, Manousos, Montinieri, Roberts, Deputy Mayor Console, and Chairperson Hemmann.

Absent: Councilor McAlister.

Also present: Jeff Bridges, Town Manager, RaeAnn Palmer, Assistant Town Manager and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Deputy Mayor Console led the pledge of allegiance to the flag.

Deputy Mayor Console moved **“TO ADJOURN TO EXECUTIVE SESSION TO DISCUSS CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS WITH MDC REPRESENTATIVES AND ASSISTANT TOWN MANAGER RAEANN PALMER,”** seconded by Councilor Hurley.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

No votes were taken. At 7:30 P.M. Councilor Roberts moved **“TO ADJOURN THE EXECUTIVE SESSION TO THE REGULAR MEETING,”** seconded by Councilor Manousos..

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Richard Suchant, Partnership Sales Manager for Direct Energy presented a check to the Town of Wethersfield Energy Fund in an amount over \$8,808.30 and thanked the Town for the unique opportunity to provide a choice to the residents.

Matt Forrest, 25 Spring Street, provided background on the reason the Town was receiving a check in the amount over \$8,808.30 from Direct Energy.

Matt Forrest, on behalf of the Energy Committee presented the Neighbor to Neighbor Challenge which is a program designed to increase the conservation and sustainability of energy for the Town and introduce programs, functions and educations to our residents in an effort to reduce energy consumption by 10% and cost.

HEARING – ALTERNATE MEMBERS TO THE ASSESSMENT BOARD OF APPEALS

John Miller, 45 Highland Street, commented on his support for the permanent alternates to the Assessment Board of Appeals. He noted that the workload could be reduced with some consideration from the Assessor's Office. The process is straightforward but he noted that he doesn't understand why the Assessor's Office reports can differ from the accountants for town businesses. In addition, he added that the cost for the accountants to prepare the reports, examine and correct the report and then prepare a revised report, is unnecessary. The policy should be to try to resolve differences between the accounts and the Assessor's Office and to record the change for the next year.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Matthew Wilson, 44 Goodwin Park Road, commented on sidewalks not being shoveled, hindering students walking to school and people using wheelchairs and noted that the law is not being enforced and should be. He noted most of the streets in Wethersfield have pot holes, making it unsafe to drive.

Lee Sekas, 117 Wells Road, commented on the issue of the snow clearing and lack of clearing. He donated two shovels to the Town to help clear the sidewalks because the corners and fire hydrants are not cleared.

Gus Colantonio, 16 Morrison Avenue, commented on Section 401 of the Town Charter which states that the Manager should reside in town during his tenure and commented that he felt this was a good idea. In Section 603 of the Charter, it states that the Department of Public Works consists of the Director of Public Works, who, until the Council determines otherwise, will be the Manager; the Town Engineer and such other employees as the Council may determine. Mr. Colantonio asked why the Director of Public Works shouldn't also be required to live in Town. He also commented that he has lived at 16 Morrison Avenue since 1973 and at one time there was curbing. In 2007 the curbing was removed. Presently in front of 12 or 14 Morrison Avenue, there is a depression on the sidewalk and Mr. Colantonio noted that he hopes it is not because of the lack of curbing. Mr. Colantonio also commented on the use of collective bargaining for the private sector.

Matthew Forest, 25 Spring Street, gave an update on the energy projects being worked on. Current performance contracting will update the buildings and reduce costs and the hydro project and is with the Town Manager at this time.

Deputy Mayor Console asked for clarifications on the rates and asked if the rate for Direct Energy is more than that of CL&P.

Matthew Forrest responded that Direct Energy's rate was higher than CL&P because of the decline in electricity prices and the decline in the market and that the last person to purchase the stock gets it at the cheapest price. He added that a reset is built into the Direct Energy contract

which will be in effect in approximately 45 days.

Deputy Mayor Console asked if Direct Energy rates would be less than CL&P.

Matthew Forrest responded that Direct Energy rates will be significantly lower than CL&P.

Deputy Mayor Console asked when CL&P rates would be lowered again.

Matthew Forest responded that all electricity suppliers have a different time frame by which their prices are renegotiated.

John Miller, 45 Highland Street, commented on the electric rates. He called and received a better rate than was in print.

Paul Copp, 100 Executive Square, is Chairman of the Independence Party and commented that on a walk to the Wethersfield Shopping Center, the sidewalk in front of Sovereign Bank had not been cleared. As Chairman of the Independence Party, he was there to recruit candidates for the party for the upcoming Town Council and Board of Education this year and for State Representatives, State Senators next year. He encouraged anyone who is interested in running, to consider the Independent Party and to contact him at Independence.party.11@gmail.com.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, commented on the issue of the non-profit organizations that are not paying taxes in town that he brought up last month. Also at prior meetings, there were discussions regarding town owned properties being sold and he strongly urged the Council not to sell properties that have the possibility of putting a house on it. He noted that Wethersfield doesn't need any more houses or houses with children. The land should be kept as open space. He also commented on the study being done on street lights and he felt the idea of shutting off lights may not be a good idea. Mr. Young commented on a hand out he distributed regarding a handout from the Board of Education and a handout from the State of Connecticut regarding budget requirements. It outlines that the federal money cannot be reduced per the State of Connecticut. He suggested the budget for the Board of Education should be reduced for the upcoming year.

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, commented on sports injuries and had a handout on a newspaper article on NFL players with chronic traumatic encephalopathy. He commented there may be sports risks for our children and felt that perhaps there is too much emphasis on sports and not enough emphasis on other things. He also referenced an article about a cheerleader that fell and now that town is involved in a lawsuit. He noted that cheerleaders were recently at a Wethersfield Board of Education meeting performing a stunt which he deemed dangerous; he noted there are a lot of things in the area of sports that may be not good.

COUNCIL REPORTS

Deputy Mayor Console reported for the Public Safety Committee and noted that they are in negotiations with the Wethersfield Volunteer Ambulance with their contract which has not been renegotiated since 1982. He also reported that the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager will be handling this matter.

Councilor Kotkin reported for the Tourism Committee that will be coming in with an equivalent budget this year as last year and they will be discussing how the dollars are leveraged each year to get grants to promote Wethersfield and noted that they are looking for level funding. Councilor Kotkin also reported for the Insurance Committee which met last week and noted that one of the focuses of the Insurance Committee is that the Town employees have a fairly high incident of health factors/disease that raises the cost of insurance. And a number of these incidents are not accidents but are lifestyle related medical issues. During the first six months of this fiscal year, there were 16 different employees, which also included some spouses and children, for a total of \$1.4 million out of a \$4 million budget. What the Insurance Committee is trying to do is to put together a program which will improve their lifestyle. He also noted that the insurance costs total \$10 million on a \$82 million budget. The early claims of last summer are greatly reduced at this point so it may be at the 5% or 6% range rather than 10% as seen in previous years.

Councilor Roberts reported for the Senior Citizens Advisory Committee which recently met and reported that there are two upcoming events. On April 7 seniors will be recognized who have volunteered around town, and the second activity will be a half day seminar scheduled for April 21 on being safe and secure, senior scams, identity theft. There will also be a shredder available for the seniors to bring in documents they want shredded.

Councilor Manousos reported for the EDIC and the Wayfinding signage program was discussed and they are waiting for Planning & Zoning to approve the RFP for that program. He added that additional funding is needed to install the signs town wide. If the funding is not received through CIP, then the signs will only be installed in Old Wethersfield through the Preserve America Grant. Councilor Manousos also reported for the Redevelopment Grant, and noted that Bartram & Cochran, a consulting firm hired by the town, gave a status report on the redevelopment plan for 976 to 1060 Silas Deane Highway. Nearly all the property owners have been spoken to except for the Dunkin Donuts property and a draft of the financial plan considering which property owners were more willing to participate. The Goodyear property is a company owned location not interested in participating because they are an ongoing business that apparently is doing well. The next step is to present the financial analysis to some prospective developers and see if it can pass as a viable development. Councilor Manousos also reported the Budget & Finance Committee is scheduled to meet on March 5 and March 12 with department heads and there may be challenges with the MDC issue, health insurance is up \$500,000, pension is up \$300,000 and the capitol improvements that have been underfunded.

COUNCIL COMMENTS

Councilor Hurley commented on the Infrastructure Committee regarding the lighting of the street lights. The first thing that will be looked at is the redundant lighting that overlaps and then to look at other areas.

Councilor Kotkin commented that a lot of numbers were thrown out with regards to electricity rates with Direct Energy. Last year when this Council agreed to sign up with Direct Energy, the rate was .979/kilowatt hour and Wethersfield has a 10% discount for seniors, which brought their rates down to 8.8/kilowatt hour. But now natural gas prices have been reduced and those prices drive the electricity prices down in New England, so CL&P now has 9.4/kilowatt hour so it is important for Direct Energy and the Energy Committee to reset the floor as the competitors are well below the .9/kilowatt hour and he encouraged people to shop for rates. Councilor Kotkin also thanked the Town Manager and the town staff for their work on the roads after a snowstorm. He also noted that Wethersfield has taken major steps in recycling and this is a major saving for the Town. He also noted that he and his son went to watch the Wethersfield Eagles play ice hockey again East Catholic at Rentschler Field and it was nice to see this type of community event on a Friday night.

Deputy Mayor Console commented that today was George Wallace's birthday and wished him a happy birthday. Secondly, he reported on the UNICO's spaghetti dinner last week and over 1,200 meals were served. He reported that UNICO is willing to purchase a new dishwashing system for the Community Center and he suggested that the Town Manager find out who should speak with the UNICO members about this matter. Deputy Mayor Console also commented on the Wethersfield Housing Authority and noted that there are 272 units and 160 units are low income housing units. There are 187 children that use the Wethersfield school systems at a cost of approximately \$14,000 for each child, for a total of \$2.6 million. He does not believe that Wethersfield is reimbursed for educational costs for these children. He noted that more work needs to be done to see how many of these units Wethersfield needs; and what should be done as the Town moves forward. Deputy Mayor Console also reported that he received a report that had been done in Windsor entitled the Police Executive Research Form, a survey done for police departments in the area that included Farmington, Bloomfield, West Hartford, Wethersfield, East Hartford, Newington, Windsor and rated the towns. Wethersfield rated very well against the other towns. Wethersfield has the lowest: staffing, costs for compensatory time off, overtime costs, dispatching and patrol efficiencies. He turned the report over to the Town Manager for his review. He also noted that a 457 liability plan is being looked at for pensions which may save money. Deputy Mayor Console also reported that the issues happening in Madison, Wisconsin may have a rippling effect across the country. Deputy Mayor Console also reported that he had met with Governor Malloy last week and discussed how the State is going to react to town issues and noted there will be some serious tax issues. He also noted that Governor Malloy may be coming to Wethersfield for a meeting together with Newington and Rocky Hill.

Deputy Mayor Console also asked with regards to snow removal, if crews were going out to clear the street corners and asked if there were still some issues.

Jeff Bridges responded that there are still some street corners with issues because there is snow so far out from the edge of the road that, when the plow turns the corner, it leaves residual snow.

Councilor Manousos thanked Jeff Bridges for attending the Webb PTO meeting to discuss the pick-up lane issue that concerned parents. He also wanted to piggyback on John Miller's comments on the CROCG issues, that it is important to get representation there. He also attended the George Ritchie Soccer's Second Annual Soccer Dance on February 11. He commented on Mr. Young's comment, not needing more children in town; he finds the comments anti-family and thinks, comments like that, will drive businesses out of town.

Chairperson Hemmann recognized February as Black History Month and suggested a few activities in Wethersfield coming up later in February and also in March.

Chairperson Hemmann asked an agenda item, B.1d. be to the agenda.

Deputy Mayor Console moved **"TO ADD TO THE AGENDA APPOINTMENTS TO THE BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS,"** seconded by Councilor Hurley.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

ORDINANCES, RESOLUTIONS AND APPOINTMENTS FOR ACTION

Councilor Montinieri moved **"TO REAPPOINT JOSEPH M. SMITH, 83 APPLE HILL ROAD, TO THE CONNECTICUT RIVER ASSEMBLY FOR THE TERM 02-22-11 TO 02-28-2014 AND THOMAS MOORE, 411 WOLCOTT HILL ROAD, EX OFFICIO TO THE BUILDING COMMITTEE, SCHOOL PROJECTS – WETHERSFIELD HIGH SCHOOL AND HANMER SCHOOL,"** seconded by Councilor Kotkin.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Deputy Mayor Console moved **"TO APPOINT LEIGH H. STANDISH, 278 HARTFORD AVENUE, TO THE CONNECTICUT RIVER ASSEMBLY FOR THE TERM 02-22-11 TO 02-28-2013 AS AN ALTERNATE, AND WENDI L. JOHNSON, 109 GOOSEBERRY HILL, TO THE YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD, FOR THE TERM 02-22-11 TO 01-01-2014,"** seconded by Deputy Mayor Console.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Councilor Hurley moved **"TO ADOPT, SECTION 10-24 APPOINTMENT: ALTERNATES TO THE BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEALS, TO THE TOWN OF WETHERSFIELD CODE,"** seconded by Deputy Mayor Console.

Jeff Bridges reported that the Town's Assessment Board of Appeals is made up of three members. The Town has had temporary alternates during re-evaluation years to supplement the three member panel. This ordinance provides for the permanent appointment of alternates to the Board. It is critical for the validity of the process to have a full board hear the appeal cases. In the past we have had trouble getting a full panel at each appeal session.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Deputy Mayor Console moved **"TO APPOINT BRENT OWEN, 42 WELLS FARM DRIVE FOR THE TERM 02-22-2011 TO 06-30-2011; MAUREEN A. HOROWITZ, 64 WINDMILL HILL FOR THE TERM 02-22-11 TO 06-30-2012; GEORGE W. COTE, 131 CHARTER ROAD, FOR THE TERM 02-22-2011 TO 06-30-2013, AS ALTERNATES TO THE BOARD OF ASSESSMENT APPEALS,"** seconded by Councilor Hurley.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

MINUTES

Deputy Mayor Console **"MOVED TO ACCEPT THE TOWN COUNCIL REGULAR MEETING MINUTES DATED FEBRUARY 7, 2011,"** seconded by Councilor Hurley.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. Councilors Kotkin and Manousos abstained due to their absence at the February 7, 2011 meeting. The motion passed 6-0-2.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, commented that the Town bought Wilkus Farm to prevent developers from putting homes on the property. He asked if these people are anti-family. He noted that his idea is to retain property to support our homes so we don't have 100 years of children going to school. Robert Young also commented on non-profits who are not paying taxes and noted that the owner of the Wethersfield Housing Authority should be paying taxes for the children going to the schools. He also commented on the street lights and noted that Councilor Kotkin was going to refrain from voting on this issue as it was a conflict for him. He wondered if there were other members of the Council who had conflicts with other issues.

Lee Sekas, 117 Wells Road, commented that he hopes that the shovels he presented earlier will be put to good use. He also asked how many tickets have been issued for people who have not shoveled their sidewalks.

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, commented on the high costs of insurance due to lifestyle choices. Perhaps the town should look into it.

ADJOURNMENT

At 9:30 p.m., Deputy Mayor Console moved "**TO ADJOURN THE MEETING**" seconded by Councilor McAlister.

All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk
*Approved by vote of Council
March 7, 2011*